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### Ivor J. Davidson and Murray A. Rae, God of Salvation: Soteriology in Theological Perspective

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***God of Salvation: Soteriology in Theological Perspective***, eds Ivor J. Davidson and Murray A. Rae (Ashgate 2011), 198 pp, £19.99 pbk

The contributors to this collection share a passion for rigorous systematic theological method. Each is at pains to situate soteriology within a prior doctrine of God, rather than viewing it via secondary process or effects. The result is some repetition and tautology as each contributor reiterates this shared approach. Yet the cumulative effect is powerful, with the potential to make lasting impact on how readers reason and write theologically.

Although many of the positions reached are predictable, seeing the arguments advanced is instructive. Stephen Holmes defends divine impassibility and perfection, while Andrew Burgess insists that divine grace cannot be received without judgement. Oliver Crisp argues that the suffering of Christ must have objective moral value if it is to be counted a truly mediatorial act of infinite objective value. Murray Rae contends that neither Israel's unbelief nor horrendous evils call into question God's saving power in Christ. The claim that the Redeemer has not come assumes wrongly that history can explain itself, while the faithful witness of the few trumps the evil of a multitude.

A notable strand concerns the openness of human nature when grounded soteriologically. Resisting the Aristotelian model of divine and human contemplation as thought thinking itself, Ivor Davidson writes: 'To be created in the image of God is to have a nature that is *not*, in fact, clearly delimited at all, but instead open to formation in one direction or another.' (p. 10) Salvation is for this reason a process of *re*-formation. The point is amplified by Kathryn Tanner, who avers: 'If God is incomprehensible ... humans must be created in the image of God by having an incomprehensible nature.' (p. 61)

Some contributors push boundaries more than others. Contesting Tanner's view that divine nature separates humans from other creatures (p. 62), Nicola Hoggard Creegan proposes an understanding of the Fall as pre-human in order to sketch a soteriology encompassing all creatures. But not even she sees that, in John's Gospel, Christ really is an animal, providing in his human animality the perfect Passover sacrifice. Geoff Thompson develops Barth's notion of secular parables of the kingdom to show how the Church must attend to the salvation operative beyond its boundaries in the free communications of Jesus Christ.

Some contributors slip too easily into a refrain that humans are wicked and antagonistic towards God and in madness refuse their true end (pp. 1, 12, 15, 19). The implication seems to be that individual humans are wretched, but notwithstanding individual culpability it must be remembered that human fallenness is primordially in Adam and therefore collective, just as salvation is in Christ is therefore also ultimately collective. Sin and repentance are therefore located within a context of human solidarity. My salvation cannot be complete until the whole world is reconciled with Christ.

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